

Holy Trinity Protestant Episcopal Church
238 South High Street (northwest corner of
High and Union Streets)
West Chester Borough
Chester County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1223

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. PA-1223

HOLY TRINITY PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Location: 238 South High Street, West Chester, Chester County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Holy Trinity Protestant Episcopal Church, 238 South High Street, West Chester, Chester County, Pennsylvania.

Present Use: Church.

Statement of Significance: This Gothic Revival Church, which has served the community of West Chester since 1870, is built of green serpentine stone with brick used as trim.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Cornerstone laid July 3, 1868. Church open for first service on January 25, 1870.
2. Architect: John Bolton (1818-1898), the rector of the church for 27 years, was also its principal architect. With his brother, William Jay Bolton, he designed the first stained figure glass window in America. Titled the "Adoration of the Magi," the window was made in 1843 for Christ Church, Pelham, New York, where his father was rector. Bolton, a skilled wood-carver and cabinetmaker, was also the architect for the Holy Trinity rectory and built most of the furniture in it. T. Roney Williamson was the architect for the tower at the time it was completed.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Holy Trinity Protestant Episcopal Church, 238 South High Street, West Chester, Pennsylvania.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Original contract let to Bentley Worth for \$17,000. The contractor for the Sunday School, finished in 1882, was William Burns, who was also contractor for the rectory. The choir room was contracted to Plummer E. Jeffries for \$1,300 in 1892.
5. Alterations and additions: The tower, about 20' square, was started in 1871 and finished in 1890 at a cost of \$8,200. The Sunday School was finished in 1882, after plans of John Bolton, at a cost of \$10,263.25. The contractor was William Burns. In 1886 the rectory was built, diagonally across from the church (on the southeast corner); John Bolton was the architect and William Burns again the contractor. The choir

room and a covered passageway between the church and the Sunday School were built in 1892. Circa 1900 the roof of the church was repaired and dormers added. It was probably close to that date that the interior roof was changed from one with a flat center to the present high-peaked one with heavy trusses. In 1901 the buttresses and walls were strengthened at a cost of \$6,971.97. Circa 1950 additions included space for administrative offices to the north of the Sunday School and the enlargement of the area to the west of the church chancel. After a fire in 1957, the Star of David window in the east facade of the church (opposite the altar) was replaced; repairs were made on the roof and interior of the church.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The first Holy Trinity Protestant Episcopal Church began as a congregation in another building entirely. A meeting of those interested was held November 23, 1835, and with the help of the Reverend Levi Bull a congregation was organized. The first church was built on the north side of West Gay Street in 1838 for the sum of \$3,695. William Strickland submitted plans for this church, but they were apparently never used. Two plans, drawn in 1838, are in the Tennessee State Library; one is signed. The original building, first a church, then an armory, was pulled down in 1913.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

Daily Graphic, New York, New York, for November 3, 1879.

Exterior photograph said to have been taken by C. S. Bradford, Jr. after 1890 is included in this report.

Numerous photographs of the exterior and interior of the church from the late 19th century on are in the files of the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Clipping and manuscript files in the Chester County Historical Society under the heading "West Chester: Churches--Protestant Episcopal."

Christ Church 1843-1943 at Pelham, New York, published on the one hundredth anniversary by the vestry, 1943.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Futhey, J. Smith and Cope, Gilbert. History of Chester County, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881.

Gilchrist, Agnes Addison. William Strickland Architect and Engineer 1788-1854. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950.

Troutman, Howard F., Church of the Holy Trinity, West Chester, Pennsylvania, 1938. This 96-page book quotes very fully from the original records of the church.

D. Supplemental Material:

The following items pertaining to the church appeared in 19th century West Chester newspapers:

1. Jeffersonian, West Chester, Pennsylvania, March 21, 1868:

"New Church.--Workmen have commenced digging the foundation for the new Episcopal church, at the corner of High and Union Sts., this Borough. It will be the largest building in the Borough."

2. Jeffersonian, West Chester, Pennsylvania, October 2, 1869:

"The new Episcopal church, West Chester, one of the largest buildings, perhaps, in the State, is rapidly approaching completion. The interior is highly ornamented, and everything about it is of the substantial order."

3. Jeffersonian, West Chester, Pennsylvania, October 14, 1871:

"A TOWER.--The Episcopal congregation of this borough, have begun the erection of a large and beautiful tower to their church. It is destined to be 150 feet high, and built chiefly of Serpentine stone. It bids fair to be a very handsome addition."

4. Daily Local News, West Chester, Pennsylvania, November 14, 1874:

"NEW FURNACE.--A new and additional furnace has lately been placed in the basement of the Church of the Holy Trinity in this place, by which means that congregation will be kept comfortable during the coming winter. This will be cheering news to those who have heretofore complained of the too cool atmosphere of this church."

5. Daily Local News, West Chester, Pennsylvania, July 3, 1886:

"The New Rectory.--We understand that it has been virtually decided to purchase 40 or 60 feet of the Buckwalter lot at the corner of Union and High streets, fronting on High. Upon this after all the necessary agreements have been signed, a rectory will be built, which will be in keeping with the architectural beauty of the church buildings across the way. It will be built this fall, and the architect will be the rector, Rev. John Bolton."

6. Daily Local News, West Chester, Pennsylvania, July 14, 1886:

"The Protestant Episcopal Parsonage.--

"Rapid progress is being made in the work of excavating for the cellar of the Protestant Episcopal parsonage to be erected on the newly purchased lot at the corner of Union and High streets, West Chester. It is probable that part of the work will be completed to-day. The dirt is being used for filling in around the rising walls of the public school building near by. It appears that some very erroneous impressions have gone abroad as to the character of the building that is under contract as a parsonage. We are informed that it is to be a plain brick structure 35x42 feet, two stories and an attic. There will be no hard wood finish as one report has stated. The work will be pushed as rapidly as possible to completion."

7. Daily Local News, West Chester, Pennsylvania, July 18, 1887:

"Stained Glass.--On Saturday last, Rev. John Bolton had placed in the front doors of the parsonage where he lives, on South High street, two very handsome glass panels which he stained and burned when a young man working at the profession of an architect. They are as bright and beautiful as the day they were made, and in speaking of them to a friend Mr. Bolton said: 'They will be just the same if they are kept a thousand years. I have myself seen specimens of glass prepared the same way that were over 500 years old and not affected in the least by the lapse of time.'"

8. Daily Local News, West Chester, Pennsylvania, October 29, 1888:

"Memorial Windows.-- On the east and west sides of the unfinished tower at the Church of the Holy Trinity, this borough, are left spaces for windows to light up the

entrance into the church, but as yet they have not been closed in. The lower portion of the tower is to be completed at once and used as another entrance to the body of the church. There is a movement on foot to raise a sufficient amount in the Sabbath School to place in the tower a handsome memorial window to the memory of the late Willie McCormick, who was a consistent member of the school, and who met an untimely death by drowning at Wawa about a year ago."

9. Daily Local News, West Chester, Pennsylvania, September 10, 1889:

"The tower of the Episcopal Church, now building, has a history of faith and charity not to be forgotten. The first donation was \$500 by the late Mr. John Tweddle, one of the originators and first Vestrymen of the church. This, with other contributions, especially by the late Mr. Isaac Lea and family, was used in laying the foundations in 1872. Mrs. Ebbs, a munificent subscriber to the church at its erection, bequeathed \$500 for the building of the tower, which was lost. Another lady who has been a great benefactor of the church, supplied the means by which it was carried to its present height. Two members of the Tweddle family and the lady alluded to and Mr. James C. Brooks finished it last year at the main entrance to the church; memorial windows being placed in it to the late Mrs. Farley, the late Mrs. W. W. Jefferis, the late Mr. B. F. Pyle and to the late Mr. Wm. McCormick. It is now being completed by the bequest of \$5000 from the late James Neely, under the direction of the accomplished architect, Mr. T. Roney Williamson. It is to be faced with serpentine stone and will be 113 feet from the ground to the top of the vane. At the height of 60 feet it is proposed to place a set of chimes, consisting of ten bells. A chime with a peal is a set of musical bells attuned to each other so as to play tunes to call to worship, to peal for marriages and to toll at funerals. There is nothing sweeter than the music of a good chime of bells floating out upon the stillness of the evening air, attuning the thoughts to higher things, to the praise of God; there is nothing gayer than a marriage peal, or more solemn than the deep reminder of the mortality of us all. A chime is a public benefaction, serving alike for the call to worship and carrying the charm of music into the sick chamber, the cabin of the poor and to the cell of the prisoner; like the birds of the air offering to heaven a song of gratitude and praise. Some one said: 'Let me make the music of a people and I will form their character.' Mr. Bolton is endeavoring to raise the necessary funds by asking public-spirited individuals to give for the bells.

He has already secured half the necessary funds. \$150 will pay for a bell."

10. Daily Local News, West Chester, Pennsylvania, December 14, 1889:

"The stone-work of the Protestant Episcopal tower, on South High street, was finished yesterday."

11. Daily Local News, West Chester, Pennsylvania, August 7, 1890:

"Arc Lights for the Holy Trinity.

"Heretofore there have been 1000 incandescent electric light power in the Church of the Holy Trinity. It is expected that by next Sunday the Electric Light Company will have taken the incandescent lights out and will have substituted for them four large arc lights, as per order of the Vestry at a recent meeting."

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This 1870 building is designed in the Gothic Revival style, using green serpentine stone with brick trim, and is relatively unchanged, preserving many of the original architectural details.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The church is a one-story building, 55' x 102' (four bays). The bell tower is 20' square and 113' high; the Sunday School is 65' (three bays) x 88', one story.
2. Foundations: Stone.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The buildings are of green serpentine stone from Brinton quarries, south of West Chester, with red brick as contrasting trim.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: On the north elevation of the church is a one-story porch projecting from the wall with a steep gable roof and a stone parapet. Leading to the porch entrance is a flight of stone steps. The east and west elevations of the porch have window openings immediately under the eaves that are filled with stained

glass. The east elevation of the Sunday School also contains an advanced entrance porch, with a steep gable roof and a stepped parapet. The roof covering is polychrome slate and has a cast iron cresting at the ridge. The opening to the porch is in the form of an ogee arch as are the stained glass windows in a row under the porch eaves.

The surfaces of the diagonal buttresses found on each corner of the tower are pierced with a vertical series of decorative bricks. On the east facade of the church (facing the street) are located a buttress and a bartisan; the northeast and southeast corners of the east facade are also buttressed. Buttresses occur between each bay on the south and north elevations, the beginning of the chancel area being emphasized by diagonal buttresses.

5. Chimneys: They are original except on main building where they were replaced after the fire of 1957.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The south and east doorways leading into the tower from the street are the same in design and material. The doorway is in the form of a two-centered Gothic arch, surrounded by brick trim. The brick architrave surrounding the door is wider above the spring line of the arch than below it. The doorway opening contains a pair of wooden doors, painted red with a stained glass window in the transom above them. An early photograph (included in this report) shows doors to have six panels; currently, however, they are covered with painted plywood. The doorway onto the north porch is also in the form of a two-centered Gothic arch and has double doors built up of diagonal boards, painted red, filling the entire doorway. The hinges on the doors are iron strap hinges in a floral design. The doors in the west elevation passageway between the church and the Sunday School are the same as those in the north porch, except each side of the passageway doors has a round window in it. The two Sunday School doors on the south elevation are similarly built of diagonal boards, painted red, but have upper panels of glass. Doors on the porch of the east elevation of the Sunday School are framed by a doorway having the shape of an ogee arch. They are two-paneled, double doors with diagonal boards painted red. The doorway on the northeast corner, east elevation, of the Sunday School is set within an ogee arch which also has a decorative brick hood molding. The doors are similar to the other doors on the east facade of the Sunday School.

- b. Windows and shutters: The four facades of the tower above the belt course are identical and all the windows are set within recessed lancet arches. There are three stone splayed window recesses, containing stained glass, set into the wall of the tower directly above the belt course. The stone sill of each is arranged in a series of steps. Located above the three arches is a smaller arch, centered on the facade, containing stained glass, and also set in a splayed recess. A large louvered belfry opening, having the shape of a lancet arch, occupies the next level of the tower. Below it is a stone balustrade. Both sides of the nave (north and south elevations) contain four pairs of stained glass windows set within lancet arches. The casement windows retain their original hardware. A large, modern circular Star of David window is contained in the wall of the east elevation (opposite the altar); above it is a smaller stained glass window set in a lancet arch. Another large stained glass window, divided into three parts, is located above the altar in the west facade. The east elevation of the Sunday School has five-part stained glass casement windows, set within segmental arches, flanking the porch. Above the porch is an arcade of seven stained glass windows contained within a continuous series of narrow brick lancet arches, sharing a single stone sill. Above the seven arches is a louvered oculus rimmed with brick. Three more oculuses are located above the window on the south end of the east elevation of the Sunday School. (On the south wall of the Sunday School are three large casement windows glazed with stained glass. At the level of the transom the window frames are arched.)

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The church has a steeply pitched gable roof, covered with slate. A photograph (included in this report) taken circa 1890 shows the church to have a polychrome slate roof similar to the roof that is on the Sunday School. The south section of the Sunday School roof, above the east facade, is patched with tin.
- b. Cornice and eaves: The Sunday School has crow-stepped gables, at the top of which are iron work crosses.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Each side of the roof of the north and south elevation of the church has three dormers. The Sunday School has dormers to the rear of

the north and south elevation also. The tower is topped with a cupola having a slate roof and a weather vane.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The church has a one-story, rectangular plan with the chancel at the west end; the major entrance and the bell tower are at the southeast end; the entrance porch is at the north end. Behind the chancel area is a new addition containing the vestry, restrooms, etc. A passageway to the north, containing choir rooms, connects the church with the Sunday School. The Sunday School contains a large parish hall, chapel, reception room, kitchen and class rooms. Adjacent, to the north of the Sunday School, is a new wing containing the administrative offices.
2. Stairways: A spiral, decorative iron stairway in the tower entrance hall leads to the chimes in the tower.
3. Flooring: All the flooring in the church was replaced after the 1957 fire. Most of the flooring in the Sunday School has carpeting over it.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster and wood; original, except where replacements were necessitated by fire. Interesting terra cotta and brick work is in the entrance vestibule of the tower. According to old records, the chancel walls were gilded in 1883. This section has now been replaced. Circa 1890 interior photograph shows the walls of the church were stenciled with floral designs called Persian stenciling. The ceiling in the church now has exposed modified scissors trussing. The old ceiling, as shown in circa 1890 photograph, had curved wooden trusses on hammer beams; panels between the trusses were outlined with relief molding.
5. Doorways and doors: Most of the doors in the church were replaced due to the 1957 fire or faced with plywood for protection.
6. Special decorative features, trim: The original delicate plaster work around the windows in the church remains. The St. Andrew's room in the Sunday School has an unusual fireplace built of decorative bricks.
7. Hardware: Window hardware, latches, etc., are original as well as some brass and porcelain door knobs found in the Sunday School.

8. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating: One fireplace in Sunday School building. The buildings are heated by steam.
- b. Lighting: Electric lighting.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: Church is situated on a corner facing east on South High Street with a service station and garage to the north of it.
- 2. Landscape: The land around it is well planted with shrubs, etc.
- 3. Walks: A ramp for wheelchairs leads to the addition between the church and Sunday School. The ramp was added in 1975.

Prepared by Bart Anderson
Curator
Chester County Historical
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August 1958
and
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December 1975

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of a cooperative survey of 100 Chester County buildings conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Chester County Historical Society between 1958 and 1962. This was the first large-scale project undertaken after the reinstitution of HABS in 1957, and it established the pattern of cooperation with state and local preservation groups which has characterized the HABS program in recent years. Written data was prepared by Bart Anderson, Curator of the Chester County Historical Society with the assistance of Jim Sorber and others. HABS hired local professional photographer Ned Goode to take the documentary photographs. The written material was edited and expanded in 1975 by Marion Morton working under contract with HABS.